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SUBJECT: Guinea's Newly Installed Ministers Hold First Cabinet Meeting

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. On April 11, Guinea's newly appointed government held its first cabinet meeting. The ambitious agenda mirrored Prime Minister Kouyate's stated reform goals, and included tighter controls over government expenditures, better delivery of basic services, and transparency in government dealings. Both the content and tenor of the meeting encourage some confidence in the Prime Minister's intentions on reform, and show an emerging esprit de corps. The new government spokesperson's subsequent detailed statement to the press not only met the promise for better communication, but actually included some concrete commitments that the population can now hold their government to meet. End summary.

Kouyate Presides Over First Cabinet Meeting, Defines Priorities

¶2. (SBU) On April 11, the members of Guinea's newly appointed government met for their first plenary cabinet meeting. The ministers outlined their immediate priorities, their vision for Guinea's future, and the methods they plan to employ to work together harmoniously. The following are key discussion points:

--Government transparency: The new government will work, act and communicate with the population in a transparent manner. All draft decrees will be discussed during cabinet meetings to ensure transparency, and regular press conferences will be held. Minister of Communications and New Communication Technologies, Justin Morel, Jr., was named the government spokesperson.

-- Review of all mining concessions: The cabinet plans to review and revise existing and pending mining conventions, "amicably if possible" but in conjunction with their lawyers, if necessary, to ensure Guinea has its rights respected.

-- Ministerial conduct: All ministers and their spouses will refrain from acting as parrains and marrains (i.e., godfathers/godmothers in the case of baptisms, or sponsors/financers/advisors in the case of marriages and public gala events).

-- Immediate infrastructure projects: Potable tap water is to be provided for Conakry's neighborhoods of Ratoma, Kobaya, Simbaya, Donka and Lambanyi and Cosa within 2 months. Uninterrupted electricity is to be made available in Conakry's communes of Ratoma, Matam and Donka within 40 days. (Note: These areas were targeted for uninterrupted electricity because their existing infrastructure is relatively sound, and because they are areas where primary hospitals are located. Currently the capital city employs a rolling blackout plan which delivers electricity to various parts of town for only a few hours each day.)

-- A second immediate infrastructure project: Solar powered street lights will be installed in the major highways of the city. The

solar panels and poles were donated some years ago as part of a Canadian cooperation project, but the lights were never installed. The water and electricity projects are prototype projects for the Ministry of Public Works.

-- Continuing engagement with the political parties: The cabinet agreed to establish an ongoing dialogue with opposition political parties to discuss the forthcoming legislative elections and establishment of a National Electoral Commission (CENI).

-- Continuing audits of all government ministries: The cabinet ordered a full audit of all ministries in order to reconcile the actual number of employees to the number of positions with budgetary justifications (i.e., reveal 'ghost' employees) and eliminate duplicative positions within and across ministries. In seeking "the restoration of public finances" the cabinet agreed to establish a Treasury committee whose scope and function will be fully detailed later.

-- De-linking of the Ministry of Justice and the Appellate Courts: The Ministry of Justice is to move to the building formerly occupied by the US Embassy in central Conakry to physically and operationally separate the Ministry from the Appellate Courts.

-- Priorities for the interior of the country: The cabinet declared restoration/rehabilitation of government buildings destroyed during the recent strikes as the top priority for spending in the interior. (Note: Several prefets and other regional authorities from the interior are currently resident in Conakry because their homes and offices were destroyed during the civil unrest.)

-- Budget: The FY 2007 Guinean budget, which follows the calendar year, is still in draft. Its completion was delayed primarily by the strike in January and February, and the subsequent restructuring

CONAKRY 00000403 002 OF 002

of the government. The cabinet agreed to operate under continuing resolution through June when the completed budget can be presented to the National Assembly.

-- 2008: October 2008 marks Guinea's 50th year of independence. The PM called on his team to think about the anniversary and how it should be marked.

13. (SBU) We understand, although it was not included in the government's public statement, that the cabinet also agreed to limit official travel to allow conferences and seminars outside of Guinea only if they are deemed relevant to the country's stated development goals. (Note: Travel has been a significant perk for government officials. As of December 2006, Guinean per diem for official travel was 575 USD per person per day. That figure does not include travel expenses which are also paid by the government. Spouses and children of officials are also eligible for the same per diem. The money is paid in advance whether the official and family members actually travel to the conference in question, whether an official is scheduled to attend two or more conferences during the same time period, and whether the official and/or family members are able to secure visas or are otherwise unable to travel.)

COMMENT

13. (SBU) Guineans and the international community alike have patiently waited for the new government to establish and define itself. The cabinet has deftly done so by clearly articulating its reformist agenda, and making cabinet members accountable to Guinea's citizens by publicizing its code of conduct. The cabinet exhibited its commitment to transparency as the government's spokesperson, Minister of Communications and New Communication Technologies, Justin Morel, Jr., issued an extensive press statement chronicling the cabinet meeting less than 24 hours afterward.

14. (SBU) Prime Minister Kouyate is quoted as telling his ministers, "Do not fear action; you can make errors but act, so that the people

will see that we are working". That refreshing approach, twinned with the fact that the government spokesperson has laid down some concrete commitments for projects that include deadlines, gives us some early confidence that the new government wants to make a difference. The people, however, will judge based on results in the longer term. If this cabinet is permitted to carry out its reform agenda, Guinea may have something to celebrate by 2008. End comment.

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